**Web site evaluation**

**Conducted for**

**(The Client)**

**By Information & Design**

**October 17th, 1998**

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**Introduction**

Information & Design conducted a usability evaluation of (The Client's) web site on October

17th, 1998.

The web site is located at:

(client site URL)

The site is intended for use by the general public, as an adjunct to (The Client's) shopfront

activities.

According to the Marketing Director, Mr (Client Name), the purpose of the site is to:

Enhance customer perception of (The Client)

Ensure an online presence in the face of similar moves by competitors

Provide the potential to expand into overseas market

Provide customers with the ability to order books online

Provide an opportunity to inform people about books in which they may be interested, thus

enhancing customer service and increasing sales.

This report presents the findings and recommendations arising from the evaluation.

The reviewer spent 2 hours using the site, and evaluated it against a set of accepted measures

(‘heuristics’).

Mr (Client Name) indicated that the site was developed on the assumption that the

overwhelming majority of customers have monitors set to a resolution of 800x600 pixels, and

the evaluation was carried out at that resolution.

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**Summary**

In the main, the web site is well presented and has a professional appearance.

No broken links were found, and this indicates that an effective maintenance strategy is in

place.

The site appears to contain most of the information a customer would require.

However, there are several usability issues which should be addressed if the site is to achieve

its goals.

There are five primary issues:

1. Navigation is difficult. Customers are not presented with a clear indication of the current

location, and it is easy to become lost.

2. Several graphic files are very large (some pages contain approximately 75Kb), which

means that pages will take a long time to download unless customers have very fast internet

access. Experience and testing has shown that customers have very little patience with long

download times.

3. The Search facility is inadequate. In addition, the ‘Quick Search’ facility is not tied

visually to the ‘Expert Search’ facility. Customers who use the ‘Quick Search’ may never

become aware that a more detailed search facility is available. For such a site, the ability to

search is crucial.

4. Several buttons (such as ‘Search’ in the ‘Expert Search’ screen) are ‘below the fold’. That

is, it is necessary to scroll to reach them. The layout is such that it is not always apparent

to the customer that it is necessary to scroll in order to reach these buttons.

5. It is difficult for newcomers to make a purchase, since there is no clear indication that they

must become members to do so. The process of becoming a member is also difficult, and in

our opinion represents an unnecessary hurdle. Error messages in this area are poor.

Each issue is discussed in the body of this report, and recommendations are made for

addressing them.

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**Recommendations**

This report recommends addressing each of the issues identified.

Many of the issues can be resolved or at least improved without major re-design.

However, it is recommended that:

An extensive re-design of the Search facility be undertaken

The requirement for customers to become members before purchasing is reconsidered. In

our opinion, this requirement presents an unnecessary hurdle.

In addition, it is strongly suggested that usability testing be undertaken, since no other form of

evaluation is as effective at uncovering problems encountered by actual customers. Such

usability testing need not be an expensive, time-consuming or difficult undertaking, and will be

likely to provide additional data which will aid in improving the site.

Information & Design would be pleased to assist in this regard.

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**Detailed findings**

The following pages contain detailed findings. A copy of a checklist used as part of the

evaluation process is contained at the end of the report on page 9.

A severity rating has been assigned to each issue, depending on the probable impact on

customers.

**Navigation**

Navigation refers to the ability to find one’s way within the web site. Navigation is particularly

important on the internet, since people easily become lost. It is also crucial to support

navigation because of the ease with which customers can switch to a competitor site.

**Issue Recommendation Severity**

the ‘Quick Search’ facility is not tied

visually to the ‘Expert Search’

facility. Customers who use the

‘Quick Search’ may never become

aware that a more detailed search

facility is available.

Place the two search facilities

together.

Consider not having two different

search types. A single search could

provide both functions.

Consider providing one or more

examples of how to use the search.

**Critical**

The current location is not always

clear.

Use the Navigation bar (which is

always available) to provide this

feedback. This can be done by

shading or otherwise changing the

visual appearance of the current

location element on the Navigation

bar, or by providing a specific ‘You are

Here’ indicator at all times.

Provide a meaningful title on each

page.

High

It is not clear how to return to the

home page. The small company

logo is on the top right side of the

screen provides this function, but it

is in a ‘dead’ spot visually.

Use the main company logo, at the top

left of the screen, to provide a link to

the Home page. This is much more

visible and is also more consistent with

general practice on the web.

Consider adding the word ‘Home’

immediately below the logo also.

High

Account information is not available

from the Home page.

Provide a link from the home page. Medium

**Functionality**

Functionality refers to the support of all the activities which may be carried out on the site.

**Issue Recommendation Severity**

It is necessary to scroll to reach the

‘Search’, ‘Next’ & ‘Prev’ buttons on

many screens.

Improve the layout to avoid the

necessity of scrolling. Where scrolling

is unavoidable, provide a clear visual

cue to indicate that there is more

information below.

**Critical**

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**Control**

Customers should feel that they are always in control of the interaction.

**Issue Recommendation Severity**

If a non-member attempts to

purchase a product without signing

up for membership, the attempt is

rejected without adequate

explanation of what has occurred.

Provide an explanation of what has

occurred.

If possible, allow non-members to

purchase, since this requirement

appears to represent an unnecessary

hurdle.

**Critical**

The Home page is 75kB, and

several others are larger than 60kB.

Reduce the file sizes. It appears that

graphics have not been optimized—

this can be readily done in most

professional (and many shareware)

graphic packages.

**Critical**

The process of becoming a member

is extremely awkward.

Resolving this issue requires design

effort. Information & Design would be

pleased to assist in this regard.

**Critical**

Graphic links are not always

available as text links. Many

customers ‘click ahead’ without

waiting for graphics to load—lack of

provision of text links prevents this.

Provide text links (usually at the

bottom of the page) to match all

graphic links.

Low

**Language**

It is important to speak the language of your customer, in order to prevent confusion and

frustration.

(No issues identified in this area.)

**Feedback**

Feedback refers to the provision of information about what is happening at any time.

**Issue Recommendation Severity**

Mandatory fields are not indicated

on the order form.

Indicate clearly which fields are

mandatory.

It is common practice on the web to

use an asterisk (\*) to indicate

mandatory fields.

Medium

There is no facility for customers to

receive email feedback

Medium

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**Consistency**

It is important to use language and visual cues in a manner that is both internally consistent and

consistent with general practice, so that customers do not have to learn any new techniques in

order to use the site successfully.

**Issue Recommendation Severity**

Links do not always match the titles

of the pages to which they refer.

Many catalogue names in links are

different to the names of the actual

catalogue sections. For example,

‘Children’s Books’ leads to a page

called ‘Kids’

Match all links to the linked page titles. Low

Visited links do not change colour.

Many customers rely on this to

support their navigation through the

site.

Use ‘standard’ link colours. Low

**Error prevention and correction**

Errors should be prevented from occurring in the first instance wherever possible. When errors

do occur, it is important to provide clear explanations of what has happened, and clear

instructions for how to recover.

**Issue Recommendation Severity**

Many unnecessary errors occur.

For example:

If customers order ‘out-of-stock’

items, an error occurs when they

attempt to conclude the payment.

If a search returns zero hits, an

error message is returned.

The credit card number field

does not allow spaces.

Examine all error messages with a

view to reducing the possibility of their

occurring.

Resolving this issue may require

further design effort.

High

No help is available for error

messages.

If an error cannot be resolved during

the interaction, at least provide contact

details so the customer can report the

issue for resolution.

High

Error messages do not describe

what action is necessary.

For example:

‘Search returned zero items’

Examine all error messages with a

view to improving the wording and

advice given.

High

Error messages do not always

provide a clear exit point

For example, the ‘Search returned

zero items’ has no exit—the

customer must use ‘Back’ on the

browser to back out.

Provide clear exit points (at least to

the Home and Feedback pages) on all

error messages.

Medium

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**Checklist**

This checklist was used as an aid to the evaluation process. Blank copies of the checklist are available free of charge from our web site at:

http://www.infodesign.com.au/forms

You may wish to use such checklists for future in-house evaluations.

**Navigation Compliance**

Always Sometimes Never Notes

There is a clear indication of the current location 9 Navigation bar is always available, but does not indicate

current location.

There is a clearly-identified link to the Home page 9 Link is on RHS; main logo is not a link

All major parts of the site are accessible from the Home page 9 Account info not available

If necessary, a site map is available 9 Not applicable

Site structure is simple, with no unnecessary levels 9 Account information is hard to find

If necessary, an easy-to-use Search function is available 9 ‘Quick Search’ available, but no clear link to ‘Expert

Search’; When zero search results are returned, there is

no facility to re-search.

**Functionality Compliance**

Always Sometimes Never Notes

All functionality is clearly labelled 9 ‘Search’ button, ‘Next’ & ‘Prev’ buttons require scrolling

to reach

All necessary functionality is available without leaving the site 9

No unnecessary plug-ins are used 9

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**Control Compliance**

Always Sometimes Never Notes

The user can cancel all operations 9

There is a clear exit point on every page 9 Shopping trolley has no exit point for non-members.

Page size is less than 50kB/page 9 Main page is 75kB, several others greater than 60kB

All graphic links are also available as text links 9 Navigation bar links not available

The site supports the user’s workflow 9 Generally yes, non when becoming a member

All appropriate browsers are supported 9

**Language Compliance**

Always Sometimes Never Notes

The language used is simple 9

Jargon is avoided 9

**Feedback Compliance**

Always Sometimes Never Notes

If necessary, online help is available 9

It is always clear what is happening on the site 9 Lack of navigation causes confusion at times; mandatory

fields not indicated on order form

Users can receive email feedback if necessary 9 No facility

All feedback is prompt 9

Users are informed if a plug-in or browser version is required 9

Users can give feedback via email or a feedback form 9

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**Consistency Compliance**

Always Sometimes Never Notes

Only one word or term is used to describe any item 9

Links match titles of the pages to which they refer 9 Many catalogue names in links are different to the names

of the actual catalogue sections. For example, ‘Children’s

Books’ leads to a page called ‘Kids’

Standard colours are used for links and visited links 9 Visited links do not change colour

Terminology is consistent with general web usage 9

**Error prevention and correction Compliance**

Always Sometimes Never Notes

Errors do not occur unnecessarily 9 ‘Out-of-stock’ orders lead to an error; typing text in ISBN

field returns zero hits instead of validating; credit card

field dos not allow spaces

Error messages are in plain language 9

Error messages describe what action is necessary 9 Gen. no help available; e.g. ‘Search returned zero items’

Error messages provide a clear exit point 9 e.g. ‘Search returned zero items’ has no exit - customer

must use ‘Back’ on browser

Error messages provide contact details for assistance 9

**Visual clarity Compliance**

Always Sometimes Never Notes

The layout is clear 9 Several screens are cluttered; ALL CAPITALS are used

on some pages

There is sufficient ‘white space’ 9

All images have ALT text assigned 9 Patchy. At a guess only about 50% have ALT text

Unnecessary animation is avoided 9 Animated email icon is distracting and may annoy